DC COMICS
VERTIGO
BOOK 3 OF 3

# Destiny

## A Chronicle of Deaths Foretold

Alisa Kwitney
+
Kent Williams
+
Rebecca Guay

LYVE AND LYVE TO DYE AND DYE TO LYVE ETARNALLY

BOOK THREE: EYAM

# Destiny

## A Chronicle of Deaths Foretold


Alisa Kwitney
Writer

Kent Williams
Painter + Framing Sequence

Rebecca Guay
Painter + Eyam Sequence

Todd Klein
Letterer

NOV. 1, 2009: FROM THE JOURNAL OF RUTH KNIGHT:

It seems impossible that Ryder made me the offer only yesterday.

It reminds me of how I felt a year after the plague began. As if a century had passed. Now I even feel nostalgia for the lost innocence of that time, when the horror was still new.

YOU'RE ASKING ME... IF I WILL **BARTER** FOR HER LIFE? IS THAT WHAT YOU'RE SAYING? THAT YOU **COULD** SAVE HER IF YOU WANTED TO?

Horror does not corrupt when it is new.

WHAT DO **YOU** THINK, RUTH?

I THINK YOU ARE NOT WHAT YOU SEEM. I DON'T KNOW IF YOU'RE A LITTLE MORE THAN HUMAN, OR A LITTLE LESS, BUT I **DO** KNOW THAT YOU'VE BEEN LYING TO ME.

YOU NEVER CARED WHETHER THE **OTHER** SURVIVORS BELIEVED YOUR STORIES. **I** WAS THE ONE YOU NEEDED TO CONVINCE.

WELL, RYDER, I'M CONVINCED. YOU CAN HAVE PALADIN. JUST MAKE THE CHILD WELL.

CAN YOU DO IT?

AND EVEN IF I **COULD** SAVE THIS ONE LIFE... IT WOULD BE A KIND OF **CRUELTY**, GIVEN WHAT I AM.

**NO.** I CANNOT. I AM NO HEALER.

BESIDES, HOW DO YOU KNOW THAT THE GIRL **NEEDS** SAVING? SICK AS SHE IS, SHE MAY YET SURVIVE, WHILE FIVE OTHERS IN PERFECT **HEALTH** BREATHE THEIR LAST BEFORE DAY BREAKS.

I CAN SHOW YOU THE FUTURE, RUTH, IF YOU CAN BEAR KNOWING IT.

BUT I CAN'T PROMISE TO CHANGE WHAT IS **WRITTEN**.

NO. IF YOU CAN'T HELP HER, I'LL CLING TO HOPE.

IF THAT'S YOUR CHOICE, RUTH, I'LL ABIDE BY IT.

BUT IF YOU CHANGE YOUR MIND...

I'LL BE HERE TILL DAYBREAK.

AI!

I could still see the marks where the boy had bitten me, livid red against my arm.

He might even have been the child who'd bitten me the year before when I offered him food, but this time he had broken the skin.

I wonder if I had begun to feel myself immune from the plague. Was that why I hadn't been afraid to touch the girl?

He had broken the skin.

Saliva. Blood. Not just close contact this time, but a more intimate exposure. I had escaped my fate twice before, but this was different.

I didn't think about what I was doing. I didn't contemplate the consequences.

I stole the knowledge that had been offered to me without once considering the price.

On a night when spirits are supposed to roam free, I sat surrounded by the woolly musk of clean sheep, and the sour, fleshy scent of milking cows. All dead now, long dead.

I intended to discover if I would soon share their fate.

But once in my hands, Ryder's book fell open to a particularly well-thumbed chapter, as if inviting me in, and instead of reading my future, I lost myself in the past.

THE BOOK OF DESTINY, GRIMOIRE PUBLISHERS, GREAT BRITAIN, 1899:

These days, Eyam is mostly a mining town, and its men cough bloody lung into their evening meals.

Child labour also fills the silk mills, where the constant clacking of looms soon bestows a *merciful* deafness.

In 1665, however, the folk of Eyam toiled in the fields and tended sheep, and if a young girl worked a loom, she did so by her *own* hearth.

HOME SWEET HOME

AND ***THIS*** IS WHAT KEEPS THEE FOR AN HOUR? VANITY?

I SUPPOSE I'M TO GO TO ***CHURCH*** WITH MY HAIR UNCOMBED?

King Charles II's *restoration* had brought a mood of sensual gaeity to England, and old Saxon *customs,* forsaken since Queen Elizabeth's time, were revived—to the chagrin of the remaining Puritans.

SIT THEE DOWN, THEN.

BUT MOTHER, I DON'T WANT TO WEAR IT ALL PULLED BACK...

THOU MAYEST CHOOSE NOT TO SPEAK ***PLAIN,*** AS A PURITAN GIRL ***SHOULD,*** BUT I SHALL ***NOT*** HAVE THEE SEEN OUT ATTIRED AS SOME LONDON JEZEBEL.

AND THOU ART TO WALK WITH ***OLIVER*** TO CHURCH.

WHY CAN'T ***YOU*** TAKE HIM? OR HAVE HIM FOLLOW ***DEBORAH*** AROUND.

DEBORAH IS THE ELDEST, AND HAD TO MIND ***THEE*** WHEN THOU WERT SMALL. AS FOR MYSELF, I WILL NOT SET ***FOOT*** IN CHURCH WHILST THAT ***NEW*** RECTOR PRESIDES.

BLESSING THE CROPS LIKE SOME ***PAGAN*** PRIEST! 'TIS NOT THE WAY ***I*** WAS TAUGHT.

YET YOUNG GIRLS ARE WHAT THEY ARE, AND CANNOT ***ALWAYS*** BE AT HOME.

HOME SWEET HOME

Ask any Englishman today what comes to mind when the phrase *"harvest festival"* is invoked, and he will describe an innocuous ceremony held in church.

Yet our quaint folk tradition is the remnant of a more ancient ritual, a relic of the *mysteries* Demeter taught her disciples at Eleusis.

Mysteries of sustenance and *sacrifice*, rites of the maiden who stirred the senses of the lord of shadows and death.

The Destiny Scroll's rather *blunt* reference to these earthy matters serves to remind us that the turn of the seasons is a dangerous time, even for young men and women flushed with the heated promise of youth.

"When the corn-maiden is in the field, come the corpse sweet revels of harvest home; We shall reap what she shall yield, the bloody price of maidenhood."
—The Destiny Scroll.

I SAW THY SISTER DEBORAH ARRIVE EARLIER. A FINE YOUNG LADY, THAT ONE IS. MY EDWARD THINKS ***VERY*** HIGHLY OF HER.

A PITY YOUR FATHER DIDN'T LEAVE YOU GIRLS ***MORE*** IN THE WAY OF A DOWRY BEFORE HE DIED. STILL, THAT WAS HIS WAY-- SPEND NO MONEY, MAKE NO MONEY.

WE CAN'T ***ALL*** BE RICH, WIDOW COOPER.

IT'S ***MISSUS HADFIELD*** NOW, EMMOT.

***FORGIVE*** ME, BUT IT SEEMS ONLY YESTERDAY YOUR FIRST HUSBAND PASSED ON.

I MUST SAY, THIS IS QUITE A TURNOUT, GIVEN THE SLIGHTLY... ***EMPTY*** LOOK OF THE CHURCH LAST SUNDAY.

I'M AFRAID THEY'LL ***ALWAYS*** COME OUT FOR A FESTIVAL. BUT THOU MUST NOT EXPECT MORE THAN ***HALF*** THIS NUMBER NEXT WEEK.

IS THAT SO? YOU SEEM VERY KNOWLEDGEABLE, MR....

STANLEY. THOMAS STANLEY.

THIS VILLAGE IS MY HOME, FOR ALL ITS FAULTS.

AS FOR THY SERVICES, TAKE HEART. GIVE IT TIME AND SOME ***CATASTROPHE*** OR ANOTHER WILL OCCUR. THEN THEY WILL ***FLOCK*** TO CHURCH.

I KNOW THAT NAME. WERE YOU NOT VICAR HERE BEFORE ME?

I WAS, UNTIL OUR NOBLE KING TOOK EXCEPTION TO MY POLITICS. BUT I HAVE CHOSEN TO REMAIN HERE.

HAVE A **CARE,** EMMOT. THE WHOLE **VILLAGE** KNOWS THY SHAMELESS DESIRE FOR ROLAND TORRE.

LEARN TO BE **MODEST.** FOR NO MAN WORTH HIS **SALT** WILL COURT A GIRL WHO'S BEEN MEETING HIM AWAY AT CUCKLET DELF.

IT **HAPPENED** I WAS WALKING THERE AND SO WAS HE! I NEVER...

WELL, TIME WILL TELL, WILL IT **NOT,** EMMOT? BUT THAT'S NO WAY TO CATCH A HUSBAND, MARK MY WORDS.

AND **YOU** KNOW ALL ABOUT **THAT,** DO YOU NOT, MISSUS HADFIELD?

INDEED I DO. YOU YOUNG GIRLS THINK ALL MEN WANT IS A PRETTY FACE AND A SLENDER WAIST, BUT YOU'LL **SOON** LEARN BETTER.

LOOK AT ME. MARRIED **TWICE,** WHILE MANY'S THE SWEET YOUNG THING WHO'LL LIVE A SPINSTER IN HER FATHER'S HOUSE.

AS MY MISTER HADFIELD SAID TO ME WHEN HE PROPOSED, "MARY, I'M A TAILOR, AND I KNOW THAT 'TIS THE **SIMPLE** FABRICS THAT STAND THE TEST OF **TIME.**"

AND I ADMIRE YOU FOR FOLLOWING YOUR HEART, MISSUS HADFIELD.

I'VE NEVER PAID **ANY** MIND TO THOSE WHO SAY YOUR HUSBAND WAS SCARCELY **COLD** IN THE GROUND WHILST YOU STOOD AT THE ALTAR.

THERE WAS NOTHING IMPROPER IN IT. MY BOY EDWARD **NEEDED** A FATHER.

YOUR SON IS **SEVENTEEN** YEARS OLD, MISSUS HADFIELD.

HULLO, CAT.

G-GOOD MORNING, MISSUS HADFIELD, EM-M-M...

--MOTT.

GOOD MORNING, GEORGE.

I SUPPOSE YOU'VE FINISHED UNLOADING ALL THE BOXES OF FABRIC JUST COME IN FROM **LONDON**, GEORGE?

N-NO...

AH, WELL, PERHAPS YOU THOUGHT IT'D DO THE CLOTH **GOOD** TO SIT FOLDED IN THE **DAMP**.

GO ON BACK TO THE SHOP, BOY, BEFORE I **BOX** YOUR EARS!

CAT? CAT? CAT?

COME ALONG, LADIES, 'TIS TIME FOR ME TO BEGIN.

COME **ALONG**, OLLIE.

OW.

AND NOW, IF YOU WILL ALL KINDLY TURN YOUR ATTENTION TO THE ALTAR, WE CAN BEGIN THIS FESTIVAL SERVICE.

FOR AS WE CONSIDER THE PLIGHT OF THOSE LESS FORTUNATE...

OWWWWWW!!!

OLIVER, HUSH...

AGGGGHHHHH!!!

SSHH!

NO! OW! BAD CAT! BAD CAT!

RIGHT. **YES.** WELL, NOW THAT WE'VE CONSIDERED THE PLIGHT OF **THAT** UNFORTUNATE...

"...LET US REMEMBER IN OUR PRAYERS OUR BROTHERS AND SISTERS IN LONDON, WHERE SOME TWO THOUSAND DIE EACH DAY OF THIS MOST **TERRIBLE** AND **DEADLY** PLAGUE."

"FOR ON THIS DAY OF THANKSGIVING, WE SHOULD TEMPER OUR REJOICING WITH THE KNOWLEDGE THAT *ELSEWHERE*, PESTILENCE REIGNS.

"I HAVE HEARD REPORTS THAT THE VERY *AIR* IN LONDON IS POISONED WITH THE FUMES OF CORRUPTION, AND NO DOCTOR'S HERBALS CAN DISPEL THE *SMELL* OF DEATH.

"MOST OF THE *UPPER* CLASSES HAVE FLED THE CITY ALONG WITH THE KING, WHILST THOSE WHO REMAIN MUST LOOK TO HEAVEN FOR THEIR DELIVERANCE.

"YET STILL THE PLAGUE FINDS ITS WAY INTO THEIR HOMES."

"BUT ENOUGH OF SUCH **MORDANT** THOUGHTS. GOD ALSO DESIRES OF US THAT WE ENJOY THE BOUNTY OF HIS GIFTS. AND I SEE HERE BEFORE ME AN **ABUNDANCE** OF GOOD THINGS.

"SO LET US NOW OPEN OUR PSALM BOOKS TO 'ALL THINGS BRIGHT AND BEAUTIFUL'.

"AND LET US PRAY."

HULLO?

AII!

PEACE, LASS. I'M NOT THE DEVIL. I MEAN YOU NO *HARM*.

YOU MAY *MEAN* NO HARM, SIR, BUT YOU *DO* SOME NEVERTHELESS. *SEE* HOW YOU HAVE AFFRIGHTED THE CHILD!

THERE, THERE, LAD, HAVE DONE WITH THAT CRINGING. SEE WHAT I'VE GOT FOR YOU TO *PLAY* WITH?

OHH.

THAT YOU CALL A PLAYTHING FOR A CHILD? I SEE WHAT SORT OF PLAY YOU HAVE IN MIND.

PERHAPS YOU THINK IT LESS A SIN TO BUY A GIRL WITH A CROSS OF GOLD.

WELL, I'M NOT TO BE HAD FOR THE ASKING, SO YOU'D BEST BE ON YOUR WAY--BEFORE SOMEONE HITCHES A PLOUGH TO YOUR OX.

OX? PALADIN?

COME, OLIVER, GIVE OVER.

NO! MY! MY!

HERE'S YOUR GIFT, AND I HOPE IT CHOKES YOU.

A BLOOD-THIRSTY LASS.

HAD IT NOT OCCURRED TO YOU THAT THE BAUBLE WAS NOT MEANT TO WIN YOUR AFFECTIONS, BUT TO CHARM THE LITTLE LAD OUT OF HIS DISTEMPER?

I HAD NOT MEANT TO GIVE THE TRIFLE TO THE CHILD, ONLY TO LEND IT.

OH. I...

THIS IS LOVELY. DO YOU HAVE A NAME FOR THIS PLACE?

FOLK CALL IT CUCKLET DELF.

AH, LISTEN... I FEAR MY TONGUE RAN AWAY WITH ME EARLIER ...I DON'T QUITE KNOW WHAT TO SAY...

YOU MIGHT APOLOGIZE. MIND YOU, 'TIS NOT FOR MYSELF I MAKE REMONSTRANCE, BUT *PALADIN* IS A SENSITIVE SOUL.

*PALADIN* IS WHAT YOU CALL THAT BRUTE?

TELL ME, IS IT TRUE THAT GENTLEMEN RIDE SUCH SHOWY BEASTS TO IMPRESS UPON THE *PUBLIC* WHAT CAN ONLY BE PROVEN IN *PRIVATE*?

AND WHAT'S THAT, THEN?

WHY, THE *MEASURE* OF THEIR *MANLINESS*.

THAT'S NO OBSERVATION FOR A *MAIDEN* TO MAKE.

MAIDENHOODS DON'T COVER THE *EYES*, SIR.

AH, THAT DEPENDS ON *WHERE* ONE LOOKS.

YOU ARE *VULGAR*.

DO NOT SLAP. IT IS A CLEAR ADMISSION I HAVE WON.

WON *WHAT*?

THIS WAR OF WORDS.

OH--

DON'T YOU KNOW NEVER TO KISS **STRANGERS**, LASS? WE HAVEN'T EVEN BEEN PROPERLY INTRODUCED.

I'M **EMMOT**. EMMOT SIDDAL.

I AM CALLED JOHN RYDER.

AND HOW OLD ARE YOU,,, EMMOT?

SIXTEEN.

GOD HAVE MERCY, SIXTEEN. WHEN **I** WAS SIXTEEN MY MOTHER TRIED TO **KILL** ME.

BUT, AS MR. SHEKSPER HAD IT, "THAT WAS IN ANOTHER COUNTRY, AND BESIDES, THE WENCH IS DEAD."

AND **SINCE** THAT TIME, I HAVE HAD GOOD CAUSE TO WISH MY MOTHER **HAD** MURD--

--MMPH.

DON'T YOU REMEMBER YOUR **OWN** YOUTH WELL ENOUGH TO RECALL HOW **HATEFUL** 'TIS TO BE TOLD, "SIXTEEN," IN THAT TONE OF VOICE?

AS IF YOU KNEW **EXACTLY** WHAT LIES IN STORE FOR ME, AND COULD TELL ME **PRECISELY** THE LESSONS LIFE WILL TEACH ME.

YET THE **TRUTH** IS, PEOPLE FORGET HOW MUCH THEY KNEW AT SIXTEEN, HOW MUCH THEY **UNDERSTOOD** OF THINGS.

CAUGHT UP IN ALL HER TASKS, MY MOTHER SEES **NOTHING** BUT WHAT IS RIGHT BEFORE HER, THINKS OF **NOTHING** THAT IS NOT AT HAND.

BUT I WOULD FAIN SEE **LONDON**, AND ALL ITS SPLENDID DANGERS! I WOULD...OH...I DON'T KNOW WHAT I WOULD DO, FOR NO ONE TALKS OF LONDON IN MY PRESENCE.

AND DON'T YOU TELL ME I'LL FEEL DIFFERENT WHEN I'M OLDER. AS IF THERE WERE SOME GREAT **BOOK** IN HEAVEN WHERE ALL MY LIFE'S STORY WERE WRITTEN DOWN, AND **YOU** HAVE CHANCED TO **READ** IT.

I WANT MY LIFE TO **SURPRISE** ME.

OH, EMMOT, IF YOU **ONLY** KNEW...

I CAN'T TAKE YOU WITH ME WHEN I LEAVE YOUR TOWN. BUT...I WILL BE HERE FOR A WHILE. IF YOU WISH...IF YOU WANTED TO VISIT WITH ME...

NO. OF COURSE YOU WOULD NOT.

PERHAPS...IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO UNDERSTAND...

I THINK I UNDERSTOOD YOU FROM THE FIRST, SIR. OR NEAR ENOUGH.

YOU WANT A **WHORE**, BUT WILL SETTLE FOR A **TROLLOP**.

EMMOT, I AM NOT WHAT YOU *THINK* I AM. I AM NOT WHAT I APPEAR.

I AM A CREATURE TOO *OLD* AND *FOUL* AND *WRETCHED* FOR ANY YOUNG GIRL TO TOUCH, SAVE ONE, AND *SHE* SHALL LEAD ME TO MY GRAVE.

AND *WHO* IS SHE, THIS FATAL BRIDE?

I REALLY CAN'T SAY, NOT HAVING MET HER. ALL I KNOW OF HER IS THAT SHE WILL WEAR WHITE.

AND IS *THIS* THE ONLY REQUIREMENT YOU HAVE FOR A WIFE?

THAT SHE WEAR *WHITE* WHEN YOU MEET HER?

IT IS NOT A REQUIREMENT. IT IS A *PROPHECY.*

AND EVEN IF YOU CAME DRESSED IN SNOW AND MOONLIGHT, YOU *COULD NOT* BE THE BRIDE, EMMOT. THE *TIME* IS WRONG. THE *PLACE* IS WRONG.

YOU MUST THINK ME *MAD*, BUT THERE ARE *THINGS* I KNOW...

*EVENTS* FORETOLD THAT I AM ALL BUT POWER-LESS TO CHANGE.

WHAT *IS* THIS?

YOU *MIGHT* WANT TO CALL IT A HISTORY LESSON -- BUT YOU'LL FIND NOT *ALL* THE HISTORY HAS HAPPENED YET.

I BEGIN TO THINK YOU REALLY *MUST* BE MAD. *ANOTHER* GIFT?

YOU WOULD NOT TAKE THE GOLDEN CROSS, BUT PERHAPS YOU WILL CONSENT TO WEAR *THIS* AS A REMEMBRANCE OF ME.

IT SMELLS... AS IF IT COMES FROM *FAR* AWAY.

IT DOES. THE HERBS AND FLOWERS IT CONTAINS GROW IN BUT *ONE GARDEN* IN ALL CREATION, AND EACH INGREDIENT POSSESSES HEALING POWERS. IF OTHERS SHOULD FALL ILL... IT WILL *PROTECT* YOU.

BE WARNED, THOUGH: IT WILL *ONLY* PROTECT *YOU*, SO DO NOT GIVE IT AWAY.

"YET IF YOU FIND THAT YOU HAVE *NEED* OF ME, COME HERE, TO CUCKLET DELF, AND TAKE A PINCH FROM THE CONTENTS OF THE POUCH TO SPRINKLE ON THE CAVERN GROUND. THEN PALADIN WILL *KNOW* TO BRING ME TO YOU."

"SO BE ON YOUR GUARD, EMMOT."

ARE THOSE THE NEW FABRICS, GEORGE?

TEXTILES

AYE. TH-THAT IT IS. JUST ARRIVED ALL TH- THE WAY FROM *L-LONDON* TOWN.

HOW'S *THAT* THEN? FIT FOR A QUEEN.

OR A *BRIDE.*

IT'S Y- YOURS, THEN. T-TT-TAKE IT.

OH, GEORGE, HOW *COULD* I? I HAVE NO COIN TO PURCHASE IT, AND BESIDES, MOTHER WOULD *NEVER* PERMIT ME TO WEAR IT.

H-HAVE IT ANYWAY, AS A GIFT. AND P-PERHAPS S- SOMEDAY YOU WILL W-WEAR IT AS A *B-BRIDE.*

IF YOU *REALLY* THINK I MAY... BUT TELL ME, GEORGE, WHY IS THE FABRIC *DAMP?*

I THINK THE BOX MUST HAVE BEEN *PACKED* POORLY, OR IN GREAT HASTE, FOR EVERY LAST INCH OF MATERIAL SEEMS TO HAVE GOTTEN *SOAKED.*

STILL, AT LEAST ALL THAT D-DOUSING SHOULD GET RID OF THE *FLEAS.*

THE BOOK OF DESTINY, GRIMOIRE PUBLISHERS, GREAT BRITAIN, 1899:

Every July 1, the townfolk of Eyam gather to commemorate the plague.

They retell the old story of how George Viccars, journeyman tailor, received material from London on 3 September and, finding it damp, hung it out to dry.

WHAT'S THAT RACKET? IF YOU'RE *MALINGERING*, BOY...

This, of course, released the *plague*-bearing fleas which had formerly *infested* it.

Four days later, Viccars was dead. A fortnight later, young Edward Cooper followed him into the earth. His mother buried him in cloth of velvet, and then commenced to sew herself a shroud.

As September grew darker and colder, five more neighbours were buried in the churchyard.

By the end of *October*, twenty-three had perished.

AS YOU ARE NOW SO ONCE WAS I. AS I AM NOW SO SHALL YOU BE.

Throughout the day, the villagers of Eyam would stop in their tracks when they heard the chiming of the Passing Bell: three times for a man, twice for a woman...

...and once for a *child*.

For months, the steady toll of death rang out again and again. And then, one day, there was a blessed silence.

ARE YOU COMING TO CHURCH TODAY, MOTHER?

IT'S THE CHRISTMAS SERVICE. SURELY YOU'LL WANT TO COME FOR THAT?

OR JUST TO SEE DEBORAH AND OLIVER'S GRAVES?

I SEE THEM IN MY DREAMS, CHILD, SITTING ATOP THEIR COFFINS...

"...ASKING WHY *WE* HAVE SURVIVED."

It was the chill heart of winter, when most of us anticipate the onset of some *illness,* great or small.

Yet, for Eyam, this frozen time brought a fragile *peace* to their village.

Some called it God's *mercy* on them: but, for Emmot Siddal, who had lost her sister and brother to the plague, it was no such thing.

For her, it was an uncertain blessing, cryptic as a *love* letter written in three dead languages.

MAY I **HELP** YOU, CHILD?

NO, I'M SORRY... I DIDN'T COME TO **PRAY.** JUST TO PAY MY RESPECTS.

I AM SORRY. WHEN I SAW YOU SITTING THERE AND READING THAT PARCHMENT...

I WASN'T READING IT. I **CAN'T** ...I THINK IT'S IN GREEK, OR ELSE LATIN.

CAN **YOU** UNDERSTAND IT?

AH YES...THAT'S **GREEK,** CERTAINLY, AND THERE'S YOUR LATIN.

BUT THAT LAST BIT'S **HEBREW,** IF I'M NOT MISTAKEN--I MIGHT NEED THOMAS STANLEY TO HELP ME ON THAT.

I SAY, WHERE DID YOU--

--GET THIS?

STANLEY!

WHY, MOMPESSON, I HADN'T EXPECTED THEE TILL MUCH LATER. ART THOU PREPARED TO DISCUSS THE SERMON ALREADY?

NO, NO, IT'S NOT THAT.

IT'S THIS MANUSCRIPT. I'VE MADE OUT SOME LATIN AND GREEK, BUT I'M NO SCHOLAR. CAN YOU MAKE ANY SENSE OF THIS?

"BETWIXT DOG AND WOLF, HE SHALL RIDE..."

YES, YES. I'VE GOT THAT PART.

HMM... *THIS* APPEARS TO BE HEBREW...

WHERE DID THIS COME FROM?

I DON'T REALLY KNOW. THE *SIDDAL* GIRL BROUGHT IT TO THE CHURCHYARD WITH HER--

--BUT SHE DIDN'T SAY WHERE SHE'D FOUND IT.

WHAT DOES IT SAY?

IF I AM TRANSLATING THIS CORRECTLY, IT SAYS THAT DEATH... *THE* DEATH, MIND, NOT JUST *DEATH* --IS STILL WITH US.

AND THE PALE RIDER IS WAITING FOR THE *TRUTH*.

THE PALE RIDER IS *PESTILENCE*, IS IT NOT? WHAT KIND OF TRUTH WOULD HE WANT? CHRIST'S TRUTH?

I CANNOT SAY, MOMPESSON. ALL THAT IS WRITTEN IS THE WORD ITSELF. SEE? 'TIS THE SAME AS THAT SIDDAL GIRL'S CHRISTIAN NAME-- EMMOT.

WHITE THOU WEAREST, LIKE A BRIDE, WHEN ALL ABOUT THEE ARE DYING AND DEAD?

THERE'S BEEN TIME ENOUGH FOR MOURNING, MOTHER. IF GOD CURSES ME FOR ATTENDING A MUMMING, THEN SO BE IT.

DO NOT MAKE LIGHT OF CURSES, CHILD.

MOTHER, PLEASE DO NOT DO THIS TO ME.

'TIS AN OLD CUSTOM, AND ALL THE VILLAGE WILL BE THERE, NOW NO ONE'S DIED THESE PAST FEW WEEKS.

AND THOU SHALL TAKE THY PLEASURE IN THESE PAGAN RITES, BUT AT WHAT PRICE?

THE OLD WAYS NEVER DIE COMPLETELY, FOR WHEN THE DAYS ARE COLD AND BRIEF THE YOUNG WILL ALWAYS DESIRE THE COMING OF SPRING.

YET DEATH COMES IN APRIL, EMMOT. DEATH AND RESURRECTION.

"FOR IN APRIL THE *VERMIN* STIR FROM THEIR DENS, ROUSE THEMSELVES FROM THEIR LITTLE *GRAVES* AND WANDER OUT ONCE MORE."

THE BOOK OF DESTINY, GRIMOIRE PUBLISHERS, GREAT BRITAIN, 1899:

Like another young woman who lived three centuries before her, Emmot set out to witness an ancient ritual that celebrated the seasonal cycle of death and rebirth.

In the Eyam version, a two-legged "ram" was usually sacrificed by a "butcher"–often the victim's closest relative or friend.

The ram's blood was caught in a basin held by "Brother Doom" or "Father Destiny" – a man with a blackened face or hood.

After the death, of course, came the resurrection: the magical victory of light over darkness.

♫ RING A RING OF ROSES, A POCKET FULL OF POSIES, A-TISHOO, A-TISHOO, WE ALL FALL DOWN!! ♫

SEE, LADS, IT'S TRUE WHAT THEY SAY ABOUT OUR EMMOT!

AND WHAT DO THEY SAY, SIMON?

THEY SAY YE DON'T MIND BEING RAMMED.

AND WHY'D THEY CHOOSE YOU TO WEAR THE WOOL, JOHN? BEEN BEDDING WITH YOUR FLOCK LATELY?

THAT'S AN IMPURE THOUGHT TO COME FROM A MAID'S LIPS...

DONG DONG DONG DONG

DONG DONG DONG DONG

I...WE ARE SORRY TO INTERRUPT YOUR CELEBRATIONS, BUT IT SEEMS...THAT IS, WE HAVE REASON TO FEAR...

IT IS NOT FINISHED YET.

I SPEAK FROM *BITTEREST* EXPERIENCE-- *IF* THE PESTILENCE IS STILL AMONG US, AND THERE IS *GOOD* CAUSE TO THINK IT IS-- THERE IS NO REMEDY SAVE THAT OF *ISOLATION*.

WE MUST KEEP TO OUR HOMES, AND *AVOID* EACH OTHER'S COMPANY. WE MUST *QUARANTINE* OURSELVES.

WE MUST GO LIE DOWN AND *DIE*, YOU MEAN. AND *YOU*, VICAR? DO *YOU* AGREE TO THIS?

SIMON, I NO *LONGER* POSSESS ANY SPIRITUAL AUTHORITY TO *COUNSEL* THEE. YET ASK YOURSELVES--

--*WHERE* CAN WE GO TO ESCAPE THE PLAGUE, THAT WE SHALL NOT *DESTROY* BY OUR PRESENCE?

*HOW* CAN WE ATTEMPT TO SAVE OUR *OWN* LIVES BY IMPERILING THE LIVES OF OUR *NEIGH-BOURS*?

AND BEYOND ALL THIS, THE QUESTION REMAINS: HOW CAN *ANY* OF US AVOID THE HAND OF *DESTINY*?

"SO I SAY: LET NO MAN GO FARTHER ABROAD THAN THE BOUNDARY STONE. THE EARL OF DEVONSHIRE HATH AGREED TO LEAVE US FOOD AND MEDICAL STUFFS THERE. WE NEED HAVE NO FEAR OF NEGLECT OR STARVATION.

"IF WE SHOULD FIND UPON OUR BODIES THE TOKENS OF THE PLAGUE, WE SHOULD CONFINE OURSELVES."

YOU SAID IF I HAD NEED OF YOU, YOU WOULD COME, JOHN RYDER.

"AND IF WE DIE, WE SHOULD SUFFER OURSELVES TO BE BURIED IN UNCONSECRATED GROUND."

WELL, I AM SUMMONING YOU.

WILL YOU COME?

WOMAN, WHAT HAVE YOU DONE?

YOU SAID... YOU SAID I COULD CALL ON YOU...

I TOLD YOU A PINCH ON THE CAVERN FLOOR TO FETCH ME, AND YOU POURED THE WHOLE POUCH OUT ONTO THE EARTH.

YOU DID NOT LISTEN WELL. I SAID A PINCH; YOU ARE PLAYING WITH FORCES BEYOND YOUR KEN, AND I CAN NO LONGER HELP YOU.

PLEASE... EVERYONE ELSE MAY BE RESIGNED TO DIE, BUT I CANNOT BEAR THE THOUGHT OF SITTING QUIETLY AT HOME, WAITING FOR MY FATE TO FIND ME.

DESTINY WILL FIND YOU WHEREVER YOU ARE.

THEN IF YOU CANNOT SAVE ME, I WOULD RATHER YOU KILL ME. AT LEAST THAT WAY, MY EXECUTIONER WOULD HAVE A FACE.

EMMOT...

SHH.

EMMOT?

MMM.

I HAVE NEVER BEEN WITH A WOMAN BEFORE.

'TIS A **GOOD** THING I MADE MYSELF A **WHITE** DRESS, THEN, ELSE YOU MIGHT HAVE DIED A VIRGIN, WAITING FOR YOUR **BRIDE.**

WHAT'S WRONG? I WAS ONLY...

THIS IS NO **JOKE,** EMMOT.

I TOLD YOU THE HERBS WOULD **PROTECT** YOU, AND NOW THEY ARE **GONE.**

I GAVE YOU THE **SCROLL,** YET YOU DISCARDED IT **UNREAD.**

I **BEG** YOUR PARDON. I HAVE NO GREEK, NOR ANY LATIN EITHER. WHAT WAS I MEANT TO **DO** WITH THE THING?

YOU WERE **MEANT** TO HAVE A LITTLE **FAITH!** I HAVE **LOST** MY PATIENCE WITH YOU PEOPLE! I PUT **KNOWLEDGE** IN YOUR HANDS, AND YOU **REFUSE** TO SEE IT!

I DO NOT **REFUSE** TO READ LATIN: I DO NOT **UNDERSTAND** IT.

YOU DO NOT UNDERSTAND WHAT YOU DO NOT **WISH** TO UNDERSTAND. THE SCROLL COULD BE READ BY A **BLIND** CHILD--**IF** THAT CHILD HAD THE HEART FOR IT.

DO YOU **STILL** NOT TAKE MY MEANING?

WHAT LANGUAGE DOES **GOD** SPEAK, EMMOT? WHAT **ACCENTS** DOES THE DEVIL POSSESS? THE **SCROLL** IS WRITTEN IN THE LANGUAGE OF **PROPHECY.** PEOPLE **SEE** WHAT THEY **PERMIT** THEMSELVES TO SEE.

**MOST** BELIEVE IT TO BE IN THE OLD SCHOLARLY TONGUES--**OTHERS** THINK IT IS WRITTEN IN A FORM OF HIEROGLYPHICS.

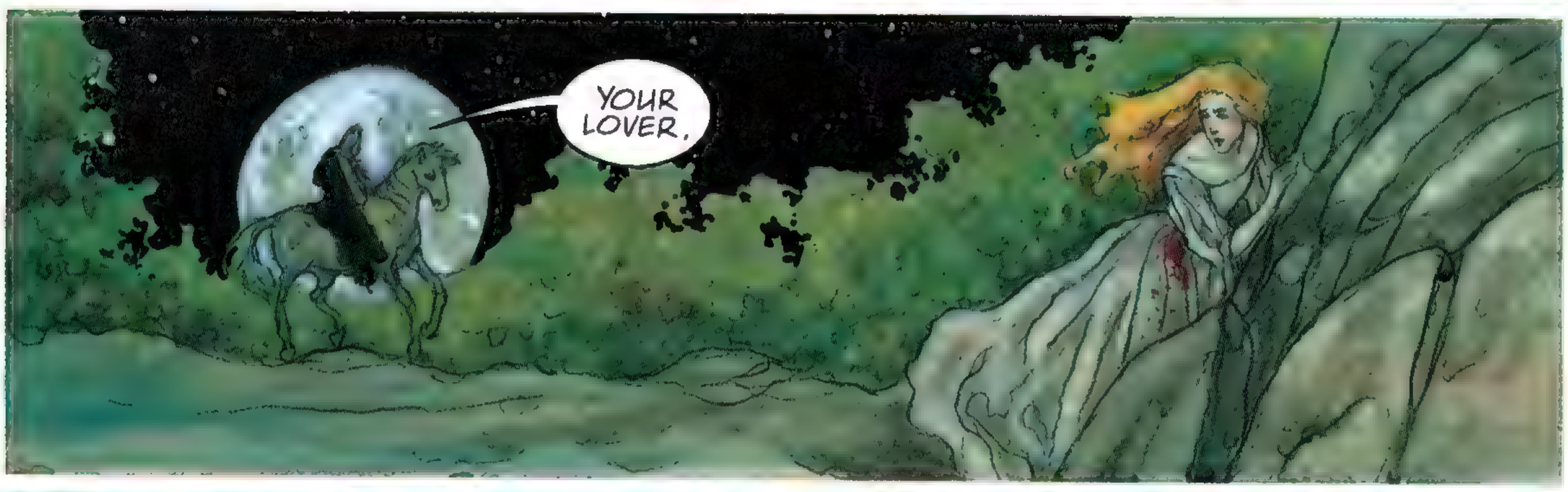
YET FOR THOSE WHO ARE **WILLING** TO **KNOW** THE WORST, THE **WORDS** ARE WRITTEN AS **CLEAR** AS DAY.

THIS PROPHECY... DOES IT SAY THAT THE PLAGUE IS RETURNING TO EYAM?

IN **APRIL,** EMMOT. IN THIS **UNNATURAL** SPRING WHICH YOU HAVE SUMMONED.

WHO ARE YOU, JOHN RYDER?

I AM WHAT YOU HAVE MADE ME.


YOUR LOVER.

"AND YOUR EXECUTIONER."

Records show that the bubonic plague returned to Eyam in April, and remained until October. By that time, *two-thirds* of the village had perished.

Emmot Siddal's body was never found. Her mother claimed she had seen her daughter walking with the ghosts of a queen and a princess in the shadow of Cucklet Delf–but her mother was known to be *mad.*

The two vicars also outlived this last, great outbreak of mankind's ancient scourge. William Mompesson left the village, but Thomas Stanley remained.

In 1670, just before his death, he *concealed* the Destiny Scroll behind a loose stone in the thirteenth-century chancel of the church.

It was discovered there over two centuries later by the church rector, namely myself.

For seventeen years I have worked at translating and interpreting the Scroll, which, to my eyes at least, is written not in Greek or Latin, but in Romance.

If my scholarship is not at fault, then the Scroll predicts that the plague will come again early in the spring of the second millennium, in the final days of Mankind.

Yet if the scroll is false, then Emmot Siddal died two hundred years ago and I have *wasted* a third of my allotted span of years on phantasms and lies.
If it is *not,* then she has found her way through the labyrinth of this life to the garden of forking paths, where the shades of past and future flit restlessly about her, knowing she carries the seed of *pestilence* within her womb.
--LORCAN CAVENDISH, EDITOR. THE BOOK OF DESTINY, GRIMOIRE PUBLISHERS, GREAT BRITAIN, 1899.

FROM THE JOURNAL OF RUTH KNIGHT, NOV. 1, 2009:

With no rooster left to herald the dawn, daybreak was announced by the leathery flutter of batwings, a dry, frantic sound like distant applause.

I had waited too long to return Ryder's book.

But he had <u>known</u> this would happen, hadn't he?

Because I hadn't believed him, I hadn't thought much about the coincidences in each of Ryder's stories. A man called John, or John Ryder. A horse with the Byzantine name of Paladin.

I'd thought it was all done for effect, the way old ghost stories always used to end with "... and that all happened in <u>this</u> very room."

And then, of course, the narrator would turn out to <u>be</u> the ghost.

I still do not know how Ryder lost his horse: whether Paladin was stolen or abandoned or even sold. Perhaps Ryder was trying to renounce his role, but if so, then why did he return to reclaim it?

What I do know is this: I invited Pestilence into my house, introduced him to my neighbors.

I thought to cheat Destiny, and so was cheated.

BAM BAM BAM BAM

NORMAN, THANK GOD. RYDER'S TAKEN THE HORSE, AND I CAN'T FIND EITHER OF THE CHILDREN. I DON'T KNOW IF HE'S *WITH* THEM, OR...

YOU'RE NOT LETTING ME *IN*, ARE YOU?

YOU MADE YOUR CHOICE, RUTH. NOW BACK OFF.

MARTIN, THIS ISN'T...

BACK OFF!!

They were so frightened of the plague, they forgot that there are other ways to die.

War. Famine. Disaster.

The other riders of the apocalypse.

There was nothing I could do.

That whole afternoon I watched them burn, and wondered if I was the last person alive on the face of the earth.

And all the while, I held the future in my hands, and was too afraid to look.

GO.

GO HOME.

The children are sleeping now. The boy would not let me give him a bath, but he ate my food and let me bring down the girl's fever with cold cloths.

It is strange to see them both in my daughter's room. I thought at first to put the boy in the guest room, but he just looked at me with those cold, flat eyes of his, and curled up beside the girl. like a young wolf.

In a way, he reminds me of Ryder: I would not be surprised to learn that Destiny has something in store for that child.

It all depends on the girl, though. If she lives, I believe they both will stay here with me. If she dies...

Ryder said the Destiny Scroll contained the answers to my questions, but all it does is tell of the four great plagues. I want to know what comes after...

I want to see the real Book of Destiny.

We all walk the labyrinth path. We all walk blind in Destiny's shadow.

Surrender your will, and let the labyrinth guide you.

Where the path *forks,* you may find yourself in the abandoned byways of the past.

Where the path is *lost,* you may wander through the burial ground of forgotten years.

And here and there, unborn *ghosts* may haunt the borderlands between cradle and grave.

But *all* roads lead to Destiny's garden.

Eventually.

RUTH... MY GOD, HOW DID YOU **FIND** YOUR WAY HERE?

I'VE **READ** THE DESTINY SCROLL, RYDER. BUT IT DOESN'T TELL THE WHOLE STORY. I WANT TO KNOW IF THE CHILDREN SURVIVE. I NEED TO KNOW IF **ANY** OF US SURVIVE.

BUT IF **YOU'VE** READ THE PAGE -- IF **YOU'RE** HERE NOW, DRESSED IN WHITE, THAT WOULD MEAN...

DO YOU REMEMBER READING THE BIBLE AS A CHILD, RUTH? THERE WERE TWO EVES IN EDEN.

NO THERE WEREN'T.

YES. THERE **WERE** TWO EVES.

AND NOW I WONDER... WHAT WOULD HAVE HAPPENED IF ADAM HAD CHOSEN THE **OTHER** ONE?

JOHN?

EMMOT.

I'VE BEEN WAITING FOR YOU. I THINK -- I THINK IT'S BEEN FOUR MONTHS. IT SEEMS **LONGER** SOMEHOW.

I AM CARRYING YOUR CHILD.

THE OLD MONK SAID YOU WOULD COME BACK FOR ME, BUT I BEGAN TO THINK...

THAT YOU HAD FOUND ANOTHER.

YOU *KNEW*, DIDN'T YOU?

YOU ALWAYS KNEW THAT IN THE END, WE WOULD WIND UP HERE, TOGETHER, IN THIS PLACE.

I MUST HAVE SPENT A THOUSAND LIFETIMES TRYING TO ESCAPE YOU, SEARCHING FOR THE MAIDEN IN WHITE WHO WILL STAND BY MY SIDE AT ARMAGEDDON. TRYING TO WARN HER AWAY, AND *CHANGE* THE NEXT CHAPTER.

BUT I SEE NOW THAT ALL I HAVE DONE WAS PREORDAINED. SO TELL ME, DESTINY, WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

A LONG TIME AGO, I TOLD YOUR MOTHER SHE WOULD DELIVER HER CHILD TO ME. SHE *THOUGHT* SHE UNDERSTOOD MY MEANING.

BUT EVERY BOOK, EVEN MINE, HAS MORE THAN ONE INTERPRETATION.

YOU CHOOSE EMMOT.

YOU CHOOSE RUTH.

SO YOU CHOOSE *ME?*

IF DESTINY'S SERVANT CAN BE SAID TO CHOOSE, THEN YES, EMMOT. I CHOOSE YOU.

I HAVE TOUCHED UNTOLD MILLIONS WITH DEATH, BUT YOU DARED TO TOUCH ME WITH LIFE, EMMOT. YOU HOLD MY LIFE WITHIN YOU.

IT IS *YOU* WHO HAVE CHOSEN ME.

THIS ISN'T REAL. THIS PLACE-- WHEN I OPEN MY EYES, *REALLY* OPEN MY EYES, ALL OF YOU WILL BE GONE, WON'T YOU?

THIS PLACE IS REAL FOR ME, RUTH. AND FOR EMMOT.

I DON'T *WANT* TO GO BACK YET. I WANT TO UNDERSTAND. WAS THIS ALL A *GAME* TO YOU? WHY COME TO ME FOR PALADIN, WHEN HE WAS YOURS ALL ALONG?

BUT YOU-- YOU MUST GO BACK TO YOUR LIFE NOW, AND LEARN YOUR FATE AS EACH DAY BRINGS IT.

BECAUSE HE RAN AWAY THIS TIME. I THINK HE WANTED TO TAKE A DIFFERENT ROUTE. ONE THAT DIDN'T LEAD TO *THIS*.

BUT *PESTILENCE* REMAINED MY COMPANION, SO I SEARCHED FOR PALADIN UNTIL I FOUND HIM AT YOUR HOME.

AND NOW? WHAT HAPPENS NOW?

I DO NOT KNOW.

YOU DON'T... HOW CAN YOU NOT KNOW?

BECAUSE THERE IS A PAGE MISSING FROM MY BOOK.

BUT I READ IT! IT DIDN'T SAY ANYTHING ABOUT WHAT'S HAPPENING HERE.

READ IT NOW.

OH!

SO, YOU HAVE FINALLY DECIDED TO RETURN TO ME.

NOW WE MUST AWAIT THE OTHERS.

Finis

# All roads lead to Destiny's garden. Eventually.

In the late seventeenth century, a young survivor of the Great Plague discovers that the pestilence which has ravaged her village is not yet over: it is simply biding its time. In the early twenty-first century, another young woman holds a prophetic book in her hands, and realizes that the bubonic plague may be coming back to claim the few remaining survivors in her own town. Both women face a choice between dangerous innocence and deadly knowledge, for both women are linked through the ages by their attraction to one man—and by Destiny.

SUGGESTED FOR
MATURE READERS

# SON OF ULTRON

# "THIS FAN... THIS MONSTER!"